

## **The BOE**

The church government is very important to every member of the church. The governance of the church is the heart beat of the church in terms of her functionality. A good understanding of the church governance helps the member to pray for and relate rightly to his leaders as well as his own service in the church. Conversely, a wrong understanding or ignorance of the governance within the church could lead to murmuring which is a sin against God. It is crucial that every member has a right and biblical understanding of his own church government. Many of us come to Pandan from different churches with different ways of doing things, so it can be difficult to adjust to the new “ways”. No one wants to deliberately cause trouble in a church unless he is a wolf in sheep’s clothing! It is safe to say that the majority or rather most of us belong to the former and not the latter.

There are basically three systems of church government found in churches today. Some of the churches might mix one or two or three of the systems and convert them into a kind of hybrid church government but when you evaluate it and “boil it down to its essence”, it will still be one of the three. The three systems are: Episcopalian; Congregational and Presbyterian. The Episcopalian system teaches that the ruling of the church lies in one man. He is the appointed servant of God and his word is law in the church. The congregation and all who assist him like his co-labourers will submit to his decision. He is supposed to be the most spiritual person in the whole church and closest to God in terms of knowing His will. Examples of Episcopalian government churches include the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Church and the Methodist Church. The Anglican Church is an off-shoot of the Roman Catholic Church and the Methodist Church is an off shoot of the Anglican Church. The strength of this system is in the efficiency of decision making which is done by one man. If he is spiritual he will make godly decisions and the church is blessed. If he is carnal, the decisions that he makes could have disastrous consequences. The church can die. There is no biblical basis for this system of church government.

**The Congregational system** teaches that the church is ruled by the congregation. All the decisions of the church are made by the congregation by means of a majority rule. This is democracy (i.e. people rule). The leaders in the church are like the hands and legs of the congregation. Examples of churches with this system of government include many Baptists churches, Brethren churches, and Independent churches. Congregational meetings are common as many decisions have to be made. The good point in this system of church government is that it is difficult for Satan to “corrupt” the majority of the congregation members so that when a decision is made, it is hopefully “God honouring.” The bad point in this system is that the leaders would have to compile as much data as possible to be presented to the congregation for them to make an informed decision. This will slow down the work that needs to be done. A serious danger is that the new believer who has just become a member of the church will also be required to make a spiritual decision for which he has to answer to God. It will be hard for him to decide as his

knowledge of spiritual matters is in its infancy. A more serious danger is that majority rule cannot decide and determine what is right or wrong. The Bible must be the only basis for right and wrong.

The Bible is the perfect Word of God. The church of Jesus Christ is not supposed to be under “people rule” but under God’s rule.” This means that the Bible is the basis for all decisions. When the people are spiritual, then the church will be spiritual; but when the people are carnal, the church will die. There are many churches whose pastors do not feed the congregation with the Word of God and they remain in a state of infancy.

Immature believers make many decisions from a carnal perspective. Churches have died because of this. Again, there is no solid biblical basis for the Congregational system of church government.

**The Presbyterian system** teaches that the most mature believers from within the congregation are ordained to care for the spiritual well-being of God’s people. These are men chosen from within the congregation who will make decisions with much prayer unto the LORD and they will answer to God for every decision they make. They must be knowledgeable in the perfect Word of God and must have the highest view of God’s Word. They must constantly study the Word of God and be able teachers of God’s Word. By their diligent study and obedience of God’s Word, they will have the mind of Christ. They will then lead God’s people in the way that God wants His people to go according to Holy Scriptures. They will be discerning with regard to how the tithes and offerings from God’s people, which belong to God, ought to be used; which spiritual programmes are to be planned for the spiritual growth of God’s people and how they are to be protected and looked after. These are all decided by the BOE with the fear of God in their hearts. Bad decisions that hurt God’s people and bring shame to the Name of Christ will be dealt with by God. They will be held accountable. They must pray without ceasing, live holy lives and must always be good diligent students of God’s holy Word all the days of their lives as they care for the well-being of God’s flock. CPBPC belongs to God and not man. Thus, if a man who is clearly not called to be a pastor, elder or a deacon is thrust into any of these positions, or forces his way in, then only disaster awaits. Lives will be ruined and souls will find themselves in hell for eternity without reprieve! This is NOT a game! The call to be in leadership must be genuinely there.

All the elders, together with the pastor/s within a local church form the Board of Elders (BOE). The pastor is the moderator. The deacons and elders form the Session. The Session deliberates on administrative matters like the day to day running of the church, who ought to care for which ministries, etc; whereas the BOE looks after the spiritual and doctrinal well-being of the church. The pastor is also the moderator of the Session. In the larger application of the Presbyterian system, all the Presbyterian churches within the same denomination are supposed to be spiritually and administratively linked together by the Presbytery. The Presbytery consists of all the BOEs of all the related Presbyterian churches, usually within a particular state of a country. If the country is large, like Malaysia and Australia with many states, then all the Presbyteries from all the states will come together to form the Synod of that country. But with the dissolution of the Synod (functions like a Presbytery since Singapore is an island State) of the Presbyterian Church of Singapore in 1988, every B-P church is now independent of one another. We are in

the period of Judges in the Bible whereby every B-P church will do what is right in her own eyes. If Calvary Pandan is not guided by God's holy and perfect Word, she will also die like some B-P churches in Singapore that have already been infected by the poison of Contemporary Christian Music (CCM), Neo-evangelicalism, Charismaticism, Ecumenism, and by a low view of the Bible through the acceptance of modern Bible versions, etc. The Presbyterian system has its basis in the Book of Acts, chapter 15.

The weakness of this system is this: the leaders may not have been elected based upon biblical criteria. The BOE makes decisions based upon a one hundred percent consensus. If one elder does not agree to a spiritual decision, it will be kept on hold until a consensus is achieved. That is why it is important that all the elders are spiritual, with the Bible as their united guide. The rule of a one hundred percent consensus is crucial to the spiritual health of the church because the BOE is making spiritual decisions on behalf of Christ, which is another reason why majority rule is unwise as truth cannot be voted upon by majority rule. The Bible must be the guide and not man. The good in this system is that it is harder for the evil one to contaminate all the elders. There is strength in the plurality of elders who are to look after each other's spiritual well-being. The elders in the BOE are accountable to one another since there is no longer a Presbytery or Synod. The pastor is not to be the pope and he is also not the archbishop. Some B-P pastors have become "popish", behave like archbishops and have made themselves untouchable. They are highhanded, give orders to the members like a dictator and intimidate the Session and fellow elders into submission. Such behaviour is condemned by Christ in **Luke 22:25-27** (KJV), "And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. **26** But ye *shall* not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve. **27** For whether *is* greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? *is* not he that sitteth at meat? but I am among you as he that serveth."

When the B-P Church of Singapore was founded, Rev Timothy Tow was very wise to ensure that all Session members, including the pastor, are to be elected every three years, unlike some churches where the pastor is elected only once and is pastor for life. This means that anyone who is in office who does not care for the spiritual well-being of the flock can and should be removed. Elections at the end of every three-year term are very important to the spiritual well-being of the church. Members must be very prayerful before they cast their votes. They must decide their votes based **ONLY** on biblical criteria and not because this or that leader is nice to them. Members must put all personal reasons aside because they will answer to God on the Day of Judgement for who they voted or did not vote for. They must do their "homework" and make the effort to know all the candidates as well as possible before they cast their votes.

**Leaders have to be appointed by God according to biblical criteria** – These leaders are called elders and deacons. Pastors are also elders. Their qualifications have been determined by God and it is not up to man to change or add to these qualifications. To put leaders into office to care for God's flock without these spiritual qualifications is like putting a fox into a hen house and relying on the fox to care for the hens. These qualifications are taken from **1 Timothy 3:1- 13** (KJV), "This *is* a true saying, If a man

desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. **2** A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; **3** Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; **4** One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; **5** (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) **6** Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. **7** Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. **8** Likewise *must* the deacons *be* grave, not doubletongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; **9** Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. **10** And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being *found* blameless. **11** Even so *must their wives be* grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things. **12** Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. **13** For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.”

Verses 1 to 7 are for the elders. Verses 8 to 13 describe the qualifications for both deacons and deaconesses (the “wives” in verse 11 are female deacons). These spiritual criteria are nonnegotiable. Every leader must possess all of them in various degrees. For example, if one is apt to teach but is afraid of his wife, then he cannot be an elder. If he has a poor testimony at his work-place, he is also disqualified. Every area of his life must glorify God. This means he is to prove maturity of faith and trust in the LORD. These qualifications are the highest and most stringent in this world. Such a stringent list of criteria has never before been given by God, not even for the kings who ruled the nation of Israel (cf. Deu 17:14-20).

Any elder who dares to say that he is not interested in theology and yet clamours to be an elder has no right to be in the ministry at all. Theology is the study of God. In fact, he had better check his salvation because God does not have any child who would say that he is not interested in knowing his father! Such a professed believer who has tasted the goodness of God’s grace through Christ Jesus our Lord and yet says he is not interested in knowing God ought to seriously examine if he is truly in the faith.

**Other guidelines for godly leaders** – In the days of Moses soon after he brought Israel out of Egypt, many problems arose and Moses had to care for their needs all on his own. His father-in-law Jethro gave him the very good advice to share the load with more leaders. Moses chose leaders based upon godly criteria to assist him in the care of the people of Israel in the wilderness. The Bible says that Moses chose able men. These able men were men who “fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place *such* over them, *to be* rulers of thousands, *and* rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens.” (cf. Exo 18:21b) When a leader fears God, he fears no man. Every decision he makes will please and honour God. He knows that God will deal with him severely if he does not follow God’s Word in all his decisions. Men of truth are men who love the truth and will always be truthful themselves. They will always love the Word of God because the Word of God is the Truth of God. He will not lie and he will hate liars. He also hates covetousness because he cannot be bought with money. There are men like Simon (cf.

Acts 8) who would try to buy their way into leadership with money. They say they want to preach and serve in the leadership but they clearly do not have the qualities taught in the Bible. Thus they mark certain leaders who can help put them into office. They will give “love gifts” to the marked leaders. Such covetous leaders must be condemned. These biblical guidelines must be kept at all times and used to evaluate all leaders because all men change. If they do not change to become more like Christ, then they can change to become more like the world. There is no third option.

During the time of the rebellion recorded in Numbers 16, 250 princes (or rulers) of the assembly joined hands with the rebels led by Korah to challenge the leadership of Aaron and Moses. God dealt with them summarily by opening up the ground which swallowed them up together with all their belongings and followers. Could these 250 princes be part of the men whom Moses chose in Exodus 18:12b? It is very likely that they were or at least some of them were because many years had passed after they were chosen by Moses. By then Israel had been wandering in the wilderness because of their unbelief. They had changed. All of us can change. Leaders must change to become more like Christ and not like the world!

**The godly decision of every leader** – All leaders make spiritual decisions. They make decisions on behalf of God on the earth concerning the spiritual well-being of God’s children whom He has redeemed with Christ’s precious blood. Leaders are not to make carnal decisions for personal gain or glory and not for material benefits and temporal gains. Men who serve for personal gain and glory must be condemned for their sake and for the protection of God’s people. There are pastors who serve for filthy lucre. They dare to ask the BOE for a pay increase. These are not shepherds of God’s flock but hirelings who take advantage of God’s flock. They use the name of Christ for personal gain. They will never escape God’s judgement and condemnation. If God is merciful to them, they will be judged now so that they can repent and turn from their pernicious and evil ways. If not, they will be judged after they die and they might find themselves in hell rather than in heaven.

**Deuteronomy 1:16-17** (KJV), “And I charged your judges at that time, saying, Hear *the causes* between your brethren, and judge righteously between *every* man and his brother, and the stranger *that is* with him. **17** Ye shall not respect persons in judgment; *but* ye shall hear the small as well as the great; ye shall not be afraid of the face of man; for the judgment *is* God’s: and the cause that is too hard for you, bring *it* unto me, and I will hear it.” [Emphasis added] This is a reminder to all leaders, especially the elders in the BOE, that every decision they make concerning the spiritual well-being of God’s people is “God’s Judgement” and not their own. They have no right to make arbitrary decisions that are not Bible based. To do so is sin!

**Conclusion** – The BOE is the spiritual body within the Bible-Presbyterian Church that is tasked by God to care for the flock of Christ. They must function according to Holy Scriptures. Each and every elder is to be accountable to one another as each must be his brother’s keeper. The pastor is only the moderator and must not act like the pope or archbishop. He is not “higher” than an elder. All serve the LORD together with different



roles or functions within the BOE. Their primary duty is to care for the spiritual wellbeing of the church as a whole. Their qualifications are of the highest order and must be adhered to rigidly for the well-being of the people of God. To lower the standard that God has set is to invite trouble into the church. Many churches have died spiritually because the leaders, especially the pastor, are derelict in their duties and responsibilities. Some churches might still exist, but the people are more goats rather than sheep. This is the sad state of many churches. The only way to prevent these from happening is to ensure that the Word of God is biblically and effectively proclaimed and obeyed by all levels of the church from the youngest to the oldest. The leaders in the church, especially the BOE, must be God fearing men who love God's Word. The Word of God is their guide and final authority for all decisions. The Presbyterian system of church government is the best system given by God for every church to guide His people. May God be merciful to CPBPC, for Christ's sake. Amen.